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Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthrop-Geography  
by Ellen Churchill Semple

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## NOTES AND REVIEWS

*Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthrop-Geography.* By ELLEN CHURCHILL SEMPLE: New York. Henry Holt and Company 1911. Pp. 683.

This is a book of eloquent pages and good literature. The authoress never allows her personality to be submerged in her facts and does not assume that interesting material is an excuse for poor style. Indeed, one is sometimes disposed to think that she is too delightfully enthusiastic and that she sometimes writes too well. It is no small task, however, to present one's problem so clearly and we should congratulate ourselves on not being asked—right often does it happen—to take obscurity for profundity.

It cannot be said that we are not given sufficient facts and well-authenticated ones; the facts are numerous enough but their interpretation seems to us often false and misleading. In a word, the writer is constantly endeavoring to make the evidence prove more than it can legitimately be asked to prove. As practically the same method of treatment applies throughout the work and the same criticism is applicable to each of them, we shall limit our discussion to the first chapter, though any other would answer our purpose almost equally well.

In this chapter we get a clue to the method of treatment followed throughout. She writes:

"Man is a product of the earth's surface. On the mountains she has given him leg muscles of iron to climb the slope; along the coast she has left these weak and flabby, but given him instead vigorous development of chest and arm to handle his paddle or oar. In the river valley she attaches him to the fertile soil, circumscribes his ideas and ambitions by a dull round of calm, exacting duties, narrows his outlook to the cramped horizon of his farm. Up on the wind swept plateaus, in the boundless stretch of the grasslands and the waterless tracts of the desert, where he roams with his flocks from pasture to pasture and oasis to oasis, where life knows much hardship but escapes the grind of drudgery, where the watching of the grazing herd gives him leisure for contemplation, and the wild ranging life a big horizon, his ideas take on a certain gigantic sim-

plicity; religion becomes monotheism, God becomes one unrivalled like the sand of the desert and the grass of the steppe, stretching on and on without break or change. Chewing over and over the cud of his simple belief as the one food of his unfed mind, his faith becomes fanaticism; his big spacial ideas, born of that ceaseless regular wandering, outgrow the land that bred them and bear their legitimate fruit in wide imperial conquest" (pp. 1-2).

From Draper (*History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*) we have become familiar with the view that the desert wastes beget monotheism. And yet, if desert wastes are responsible for religious conceptions why not for any and every other conception? If responsible for all, then how account for such vital differences as exist between Central Australians and Arabs—a difference is in no wise consistent with the great similarity of climate and country? But if geographical environment is not responsible for all why single out religion? Can it be because that particular thing happens to fit the fancy of the theorizer, and gives *prima facie* support to her thesis? "Chewing over and over the cud of . . . simple belief as the one food of (the) unfed mind," is not the only condition in which "faith becomes fanaticism." Why not admit as much, even though it be to the prejudice of one's cause? Indeed we do not feel sure that either fanaticism or monotheism are part and parcel of a desert environment and can flourish no where save "up on the wind swept plateau in the boundless stretch of the grasslands and the waterless tracts of the desert." Indeed these desert roving, 'monotheistic' Arabs seem to have as many *Jinn* inhabiting their monotonous wastes as any people living in a most delightfully varied locality. The sprites of the wooded hills do not always outnumber the troublesome *Jinn* of the treeless desert.

Admit that "man can no more bescientifically studied apart from the ground which he tills, or the lands over which he travels, or the seas over which he trades, than polar bear or desert cactus can be understood apart from its habitat" (p. 2); still we should scarcely expect to learn much about the animals or plants of an unknown region—except by knowledge of proximate regions—from a study restricted to its climate and geography. For this reason we fail to see "the significance of Herder's saying that 'history is geography set into motion,'" or of that of the authoress informing us that, "what is today a fact of geography becomes tomorrow a factor of history" (p. 11). So, in the instance of political union in Switzerland (cited on p. 16-17) the efficient influence was the desire for self-preservation and protection and the geographic conditions were mere inci-

dents in the formation of the confederacy. The same political dangers transferred from one geographical environment to another give rise to similar means of self-protection among the same people—a fact which seems to make against rather than for the writer's contention. We have seen an attempt by a very respectable writer to show that the art of Pompeii and Herculaneum was due to the beauty of the surrounding region, but the view (quoted with implied approval) that "the absence of artistic and poetic development in Switzerland and the Alpine lands" is to be ascribed "to the overwhelming aspect of nature there, its majestic sublimity which paralyses the mind" (p.19–20), is to us a new one that outrivals its predecessors. To be sure "the facts are incontestable," but just now we are concerned with the interpretation of those facts, and in such a case a multitude of illustrations does not support one's contention any more than a single instance. Ten thousand instances in which long noses and red hair are associated with uprightness and zeal do not support a contention that a combination of long noses and red hair has a good influence upon character, any more than a single instance supports it. The sum total of influences must be taken into consideration before the really efficient ones can be singled out and emphasized; it is easy to confuse chance and condition with cause.

The impression one gets after reading through these more than six hundred pages is that they do not assist very materially in a solution of the problems with which they deal. Facts of rather heterogeneous ancestry and of more or less arbitrary classification are offered us in support of a given thesis, but scarcely ever do we get the facts which offset them, and which are indispensable in giving to any piece of evidence its true value. An intensive study of a given limited region or regions in which there was this attempt to determine the relative influence of geographic environment as compared with that of social traditions and prevailing religious convictions or political organization, for example, would, we venture to suggest, have had more value, in just that degree to which it took us nearer to the heart of the problem.

W. D. WALLIS.

*The Chinese Revolution.* By ARTHUR JUDSON BROWN, D.D.  
Student Volunteer Movement. New York, 1912. Pp. 217.

To one who wishes an interesting, well-written yet reliable account of the Chinese revolution, this book is highly recommended. While it is based upon the author's earlier work, *New Forces in Old China*, the developments of the past few years and